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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the concept of critical viewing and illustrates what it means to take a critical stance in classroom teaching practice. The paper's purposes are: first, to discuss the possibilities of criticism in classroom practice as defined by progressive educators; second, to explain the interrelationship between critical literacy and the pedagogy of representation; and, third, to explore critical viewing as a response to "Intermediality." Intermediality implies taking a critical stance toward the multiple perspectives embedded in Intermedial, or simply, multi-layered texts. Defining critical viewing as a critical pedagogy of representation exposes the misconceptions associated with response-centered approaches which have assumed the central position of critical reader/viewing practices. The paper's aim is to show how a teacher can use critical viewing as a language of criticism to sift through multiple layers of texts, to go beyond surface impressions, traditional myths, and routine cliches, and to apply the meaning to each person's own social context. The paper challenges teachers to reevaluate current analytical schemes to gain a more contextual understanding of the mutually constitutive nature of theory and practice. It states that, to implement the vision of criticism illustrated here, students will be able to: (1) acknowledge the "multiple and insidious ways" in which power operates in the larger society to "reproduce the interests of the dominant culture"; and (2) analyze the hierarchical positioning of individuals within the social order on the basis of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Contains 58 references. (NKA)

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Critical Viewing in Media Literacy Practice

by

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Critical Viewing in Media Literacy Practice

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This paper introduces the concept of critical viewing and illustrates what it means to take a critical stance in classroom teaching practice. Critical viewing is a concept built around what has become known as the discourse (language) of "criticism." A discourse of criticism is simply a critical analysis of social practice. Stuart Hall (1996) describes discourses as ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. A discourse of criticism in a classroom setting therefore calls for a practice of curriculum inquiry in which teachers and students question the forms of knowledge, ideas, images, and classroom practices found in all texts used in the curriculum. In such inquiry, critical viewing becomes an analysis of all visual images which represent events, experiences, and ideas produced and circulated through classroom practice and through media texts. Most of the ideas and practices of critical viewing are drawn from media theory, critical pedagogy of representation, discourse analysis, cultural studies, and postmodernist thought. The practice of critical viewing provides teachers and students and langage of criticism with which to examine the ways of thinking about the production of knowledge and of negotiating through praxis the relationship among classroom teaching, as well as the larger institutional structures of the school, and nation state.

Through this language of criticism, innovative teachers struggle to find analytical strategies which illuminate their understandings and interpretations of textual references

and social contexts found in school structures, literature, and the modern mass media--all which tend to perpetuate inequalities on the basis of social class, race, gender, and sexual orientation. When these teachers talk about critical viewing as a form of social critique in their classrooms, they are talking about actively extending students' understanding of the ways meanings are constructed by developing strategies to analyze, evaluate, critique, and interpret belief systems and communicative practices embedded in printed texts, television programs, and other popular media. Unfortunately, todate, the education establishment does not have a coherent strategy or methodology to examine the relationship with media, particularly strategies which enable students to develop a critical stance against the manipulation, overt bias, discrimination, and seductions of media spectacles. The main purpose of this paper is, first to discuss the possibilities of criticism in classroom practice as defined by progressive educators. As will be shown, by defining critical viewing as a critical pedagogy of representation, I will expose the misconceptions associated with response-centered approaches which have assumed the central position of critical reader/viewing practices. The main task will be to show how a teacher can use critical viewing as a language of criticism to sift through multiple layers of texts, and be able to go beyond surface impressions, traditional myths, and routine clichés; applying the meaning to one's own social context. The second task will be to explain the interrelationship between critical literacy and the pedagogy of representation and third to explore critical viewing as a response to Intermediality.

Possibilities of the Language of Criticism

In the past, discourse analysis, and reader-response criticism have been used in classrooms as analytical schemes (Karolides, 1992). These response-centered

transactional approaches, which insist on the reader's role in conjunction with the text, the reader's individuality affecting and being affected by the text, have influenced many teachers in how they teach the interpretation of meaning in literature. In spite of considerable disagreement among theorists as to what these analytical approaches can do for students as they learn how language works and struggle with interpreting meaning in literature (see for example, Mailloux, Suleiman and Crossman, and Tompkins), for many teachers however, it has become a significant and viable tool for: (1) deciphering and clarifying the reading process; (2) determining the role of the reader in relation to the text; (3) exploring how meaning is made; (4) defining the nature of the interpretative act; and (5) assessing the influence of reading communities and literature conventions (Karolides, 1992, p. xi).

In more recent years, this preoccupation with meaning has taken a different turn, being more concerned, not with detail of how language works, but with the broader role of discourse in culture. While critics of language of criticism and educational approaches often decry their idealist multiculturalism, advocates, including Aronowitz, Freire, Giroux, Kincheloe, McLaren and others, have complained that critical pedagogy has often been domesticated and reduced to student-directed learning devoid of social critique. By this we mean that unawares, a language of criticism that is not rooted in practice can easily become irrelevant, and even dogmatic or prescriptive in certain circumstances. For example, when the notion of critical reading/viewing is used in English/language arts classrooms, analysis of texts tends to remain at the reader-response level and does not always take a "critical stance" or include the language of criticism. This paper challenges teachers to reevaluate these analytical schemes to gain a more contextual understanding of the mutually constitutive nature of theory and practice. With this objective, I propose

critical viewing as a vision of criticism. The underlying assumption is that the notion of Intermediality implies taking a critical stance toward the multiple perspectives imbedded in Intermedial, or simply, multi-layered texts.

Taking a critical stance calls for analytical strategies to sift through the multiple layers of texts presented in such Intermedial environments of websites, videos, and electronic bulletin boards. As a reflective approach to teaching and learning, critical viewing bridges theory and teaching practice. Advocates of this language of criticism would have us pay attention to how our society is marked by a multiplicity of cultures, meanings, and values. By guiding students' attention to how powerful groups define their own particular meanings, values, experiences and forms of writing and reading as the valued ones in society, students would better understand the inequalities and violations of social justice the mass media continue to peddle through its production of culture products. Furthermore, through this reflective approach, we hope to illustrate how theory and practice of a critical pedagogy helps students to engage in the social struggle over meaning and to navigate today's classrooms, which have become inundated by diverse and multiple layers of printed and electronic texts. To implement the vision of criticism illustrated in this essay, students will be able to (1) acknowledge the multiple and insidious ways in which power operates in the larger society "to reproduce the interests of the dominant culture" (Hammer, 1995, p. 79); and (2) analyze the hierarchical positioning of individuals within the social order on the basis of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Extending the Language of Criticism to Media Literacy Practices

In the past, textual analysis was confined to the literary scrutiny of printed words. Students analyzed stories, plays, poems, essays, and novels. Today, even though this literary analysis in classrooms has expanded to include visual images and electronic messages, analysis has remained limited to response-centered transactional approaches. Teachers using these approaches are often content to seek to see in literature what has previously been invisible and to hear what has previously been inaudible. Furthermore, by adhering to a reader/viewer-response model, teachers in the English classrooms maintain that their approach fosters critical thinking and critical viewing skills. Typical response-centered teaching practices include exercises such as: making students write a review of a film, testing for a good cinematic scene, or asking students to indicate or imagine what they would miss if they only heard the dialogue of a film (Teasley & Wilder, 1997, p. 47). . Such activities strive to ensure that content is mastered by encouraging students to take copious notes, pause to ask questions, and keep track of elapsed time, main events, and notable literary, dramatic, or cinematic aspects (Teasley & Wilder, 1997, p. 114-145).

Within this pragmatic approach, critical reading/viewing is confined to literary or artistic analysis notably appropriate for film criticism, which for the most part, provides key analysis of media for entertainment and to enhance enjoyment of the arts. When this approach is transferred to cover visual and electronic media, it is taken up mainly to persuade supervisors and principals as teachers strive to legitimate viewing of films and television programs in the classroom and as a way to respond to the long time criticism about the educational role the mass media of entertainment in our schools. This superficial transfer of analytical strategies from a response-centered approach of printed

works to visual images has recently been adopted by some educators in their classrooms as well as some newspaper in education (NIE) organizations throughout the country (Garrett, n.d.). By carrying out this acclaimed active viewer model with their students in large part adopted from Eddie Dick (1991) of the Scottish Film Council, these educators claim that they are in fact teaching critical media literacy.

Even though the reader/viewer response approach calls for students to be active viewers--paying close attention to film details, writing down immediate responses, discussing interpretations with fellow students, and supporting opinions with evidence from the film--such analysis rarely moves beyond the content of the visual imagery or beyond the ability to simply remember and understand visual information. Unfortunately, this approach and other student-centered teaching strategies like it demand a teaching paradigm markedly different from the one practiced in most U.S. classrooms today. The typical U.S. model of teaching is pragmatic and skill-based, relying on rote learning and lecture (Tyner, 1993). Most often, media texts are treated like a piece of literature; students typically spot themes, do a chart, fill out a log, complete worksheets, make a list, or write a response, neglecting a critical analysis of the media text (See examples provided by Davies, 1996, p. 207-208). Perhaps what Davies and others have overlooked and is probably needed, as explained by Barry Duncan, president and founder of the Canadian Association of Media Literacy (founded in 1978), are "more cultural approaches to literature and not more literary approaches to popular culture" (Duncan, 1993, p. 14).

Therefore, teaching critical viewing must aspire to teach the youth in our classrooms, particularly those impressionable groups or individuals in desperate search of an identity and a place in the adult world. For these groups, critical viewing will bolster

skills and knowledge they need to be able to consciously reflect on their interactions with media. As the media from which they obtain information and stories become the main source of daily input of news, perceptions, impressions, and assumptions about what it means to be successful, healthy or beautiful, the lines between truth, fiction, and history become blurred. In this instance, critical viewing will enable them to differentiate fact from fiction, narrative from live reporting and will address injustices; become critical actors committed to combat problems of youth apathy, violence, substance abuse, rampant consumerism; and to generate a strong commitment to developing a world free of oppression and exploitation. Linking this vision of criticism with social concerns affirms what it means to be educated and to be media literate in a media saturated milieu, in which information gathering and distribution processes thrive on the manipulation of seductive media spectacles, a phenomenon unlikely to go away in the immediate future.

Although the language of criticism on education has, for the past 20 years, proliferated within academic circles, it has received practically no attention in public schools or society at large. Critical theorists in academic institutions, particularly those who engage in debates in the emerging field of cultural studies (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Freire, 1970; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Simon, 1987), have used the language of criticism to provide educators with numerous insights. As a cross-disciplinary endeavor, cultural studies is concerned with institutions, representations, systems of beliefs, and communicative practices. Cultural studies has found its motive to explore the culture industries and their messages from a critical theory perpective which in its initial stages heavily criticized the marxist analysis of political economy. Its language of criticism, and the insights gained from cultural studies, have uncovered the myth that

schools in our society serve as the "great equalizer," which allows children from all social and economic backgrounds compete fairly in our market place economy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 26). It has also exposed the ways in which conventional schools in society transmit a "hidden curriculum," which undermines most of our children's sense of self esteem, efficacy, and compassion, and which also profoundly narrows whose "voices" (e.g., men over women, whites over people of color, industrialists over laborers, militarists over peace activists), dictates what epistemological and social values are expressed in classrooms (Goodman, 1992, p. 271). However, during the last decade, conservatives largely have set the agenda and tone for public mood regarding education in our society with issues like school choice, vouchers, tightening standards, emphasis on phonics, back-to-basics, etc. Clearly, this vision of criticism illustrated in Goodman's (1992) comments represents an alternative to this conservative, dominate agenda, as well as to the common view of teachers in our society as educational and classroom managers.

In Pennsylvania, for example, teachers in many school districts have until now paid little or no attention to the language of criticism, particularly with specific reference to the unexplored resources of media texts. This situation may be more so because teachers accept media information as entertainment and therefore mass media are seen to have little to do with literacy, learning, or schools (Witkin, 1994). This is by no means an attack on the Pennsylvania teachers for benign neglect of their teaching profession. Far from it. For many educators, critical viewing, interpreting, and "reading" television are foreign concepts. Perhaps, this stems from social attitudes about the entertainment media and the scant attention given to media and television during teacher education. In studies of visual communication and media education, critical viewing is not used widely in American classrooms as a tool for deconstructing media images, particularly those

images that represent people's culture, identity, or ethnicity (Semali, 1998). This may be because the media literacy movement is fairly new to many schools. While critical reading/viewing has began to occur in other countries, it is not yet happening in most U.S. public schools.

While addressing the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, Francis Davis (1992) outlined the long history in the United States--a history of the electronic media--regarding the influence of mass media and how its far-reaching expansion of the media has led to strategies of protecting or empowering the public: regulation, pressure on advertisers or those responsible for creation of mass media, and media education. As Davis rightly concludes from his presentation, these three current strategies are unified by their common assumption that something about the mass media environment is problematic. The public must either be protected against media or empowered so that the negative effects of the mass media are lessened and the positive enhanced.

These protectionist and civic defense arguments have driven the movement of media literacy in the United States (Buckingham, 1991, p. 13). Not so long ago, the movement to teach media literacy in U.S. public schools, which began in Britain and spread to Canada and Australia, (also known in these countries as media education) was sparked by a 1972 report by the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on television and violence. This comprehensive research study indicated that heavy viewing is related to a decrease in creativity; and violence is linked to criminal or aggressive behavior (U.S. Department of Health, 1982). This study resulted in government funding to teach critical viewing skills in the public schools, including those strategies developed by WNET-New York (WNET, 1979, p. ii). Twenty-two years later, President Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which described what students should be taught and

how they should be tested in core subjects. Later, after months of national debate and capitalizing on the successes of passing the Children's Television Act of 1990, the Arts were added to the list of core subjects, which included teaching media literacy in all primary and secondary schools (see for example, academic standards of Minneapolis and New Mexico, Outcome Based Education goals of Pennsylvania). As teachers steadily continue to join the national movement of media literacy, the importance of critical literacy has increased. Overall, most teachers seem positive about the validity of media literacy and its social relevance to students, particularly in the efforts to enable students to resist media manipulation and rampant consumerism (NCATE, 1994, 1996).

Since the 1992 National Conference on Media Literacy, steady progress has been made to explore the potential of media literacy practices in U.S. classrooms. So far, efforts, research, and debates have taken place to develop a rationale for teaching media literacy in schools, and to enable students to resist media manipulation. To develop such a rationale, and such an empowering classroom model, media educators warn that media literacy must go beyond earlier protectionist strategies. Debates and lectures by British media educators Len Masterman and David Buckingham, for example, have suggested that television prepares viewers to be consumers through its constant repetition of commercials and fancy bedroom suites (Buckingham, 1990, Masterman, 1992). In addition, the mass media promote male dominant gender roles and racist attitudes (Buckingham, 1990). These views sum up the widespread idea that the media are powerful and have negative influences. Viewed this way, the mass media are seen as contributing to the perpetuation of a number of objectionable ideologies. Over time, these arguments focusing on negative effects have been used to a great advantage by media education advocates in establishing the need for media literacy (These arguments

have resurfaced again recently after school site shootings by teenagers in Mississippi, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and Oregon). But Buckingham has warned that a distinction needs to be made between "simpler, more rhetorical arguments which may be of use in promoting media literacy, and more complex understanding which should inform classroom practice" (Buckingham, 1990, p. 8). In other words, Buckingham warns against pushing the "negative" media effects card to sell the idea of media literacy, because in practice, it results in an activist stance in which certain ideologies about media literacy are pushed, rather than a critical stance in which participants probe their relationship with media, raise issues and questions in response to media texts (Buckingham, 1991). Buckingham argues against the protectionist stance held by conservatives who view the media as corruptive, responsible for illiteracy, and the reason for moral decadence looming large in society.

Theories of Media Analysis

Media experts have relied on the study of language, the study of signs (semiotic/textual analysis) constructivist and postmodern critical theories to develop methods of analysis of media texts. Some of these analytical approaches include (1) content analysis (Gerbner, Holsti, Krippendorf, Paisley, & Stone, 1969); (2) uses and gratification analysis (Blumler, & Katz, 1974; 1975); (3) Semiotic/textual analysis (Hartley & Fiske, 1977; Metz, 1974; Heath, 1977; Wollen, 1969; Wollen, 1969); (4) cultural analysis (Bigsby, 1976; Hartley & Hawkes, 1977; Berger, 1972; and more recently, Rushkoff, 1996; Giroux, 1997; and (5) critical analysis (Bigsby, 1975; Schiller, 1970). Unfortunately, there is no one method capable of analyzing adequately all texts in all circumstances. Current literature offers examples of single methods or a combination of

these analytical frameworks. For example, in their book, Visual Messages, Considine and Haley (1992) summarize the growing research on critical viewing of media programs. The methods they outlined in this book do not originate from any one theory. Viewed as analytical tools rather than a process of reading television and the context in which its programs become produced and distributed, Considine and Haley list five constituent elements: (1) skill to interpret the internal content of the program, (e.g., focusing on the narrative analysis of what happened and why, with reference to genre codes and conventions); (2) interpret the internal construction of the frame, (e.g., media form and style); (3) recognize the external forces and factors shaping the program (e.g., media ownership and control); (4) compare and contrast media representations with reality (e.g., detecting stereotyping, bias, distortion of facts, and what happens in real life); and (5) recognize and respond to the potential impact of television form and content (e.g., action on the information, like expressing opinions or outrage to producers or newspaper editors).

Apparently, the main preoccupation of the authors of Visual Messages is the form and content of the media artifact(s). Such a content-based framework overlooks issues of power relations, economic inequalities, and hegemonic ideologies which tend to preserve practices of dominant forces in the existing society. Paying exclusive attention to form and content ignores a process of analysis that might get at the manipulation, distortion, overt bias, and stereotyping. The making sense or reflection and action to be taken as a response of the exposure to the media is left to the individual. Considine and Haley equate critical reading with content analysis, where students in an English classroom are urged to recognize themes and lessons that are embedded in a media program (see for example chapter 2 of Visual Messages). They assume that being able

to recognize the advertising tricks is sufficient to guard oneself against unconscious consumption and commercialism.

Clearly, there is considerable tension between content (what we teach) and form (how we teach). So far, there does not seem to be an easy resolution of such tension in the horizon. Media educators (e.g., Barry Duncan, 1993) have complained about teaching critical viewing in terms of content. These educators hold such practice suspect because it is limited. Perhaps such narrow practice has made its way into classrooms from a variety of sources. One identifiable source is likely to be the way media literacy is often defined and directed by media critics and theorists, not by media educators. As explained above, many critical viewing practices have been prescribed by teachers of literature, borrowing much of the analytical approaches from literary analysis. Such borrowing from literary approaches may not be appropriate or go far enough to be defined as critical viewing. As lamented by Kellner (1995), the analytical steps summed up by Considine and Haley and others (e.g., Davies, 1995; Teasley & Wilder, 1996), including the Frankfurt School, do not go far enough in the reading of media and cultural products. The majority of studies in reading television have neglected the language of criticism to the extent that it touches on social, political, and ideological domains. For instance, Kellner insists that these theorists, particularly the Frankfurt School, developed a powerful critique of the cultural industries and the ways that the media industries manipulate individuals into conforming to the beliefs, values, and practices of the existing society, but the critical theorists "lack theories of how one can resist media manipulation, how one can come to see through the ruses and seductions, how one can read against the grain to derive critical insights into self and society through the media, and how one can produce alternative forms of media and culture" (Kellner,

1995, p. xiv). Perhaps critical viewing, when conceptualized as "a vision of criticism" of popular media and culture industries can provide teachers and students with a framework necessary for the critical analysis of media manipulation and ideological texts. Teachers can benefit from utilizing such framework to recognize the alternative sources of information available to students in school and out of school environments.

Critical Viewing Versus Media Criticism

The concept of critical viewing is distinguished from the kind of viewing for pleasure or entertainment so often limited to television and film criticism. As a form of social critique, critical viewing goes beyond the criticism of the arts. It refers to gaining skills necessary to analyze and critically dissect all forms of culture--whether print, visual, or performance--with which individuals interact, ranging from books to film artifacts, television, radio and the other products of the cultural industries. A critical viewing of these cultural forms extends the process of critical literacy which gives individuals power over their culture and thus empowers them, "enabling people to create their own meanings, identities, and to shape and transform the material and social conditions of their culture and society" (Kellner, 1995, p. 61).

While reviewing recent works of Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, and Alan Luke, Colin Lankshear (1994) explains critical literacy as a form of alternative pedagogy that examines the politics and sociolinguistic stances. Lankshear delineates what it means to be critical. He stresses that the adjective "critical" and its correlates, "criticism," "criticize", and "critique", convey the idea of judging, comparing, or evaluating on the basis of careful analysis. With critical literacy, students learn to

become critical consumers who are aware of visual manipulation, bias, and stereotyping as an important project of literacy education. Ira Shor (1993) defines critical literacy as:

> [a]nalytic habits of thinking, reading, speaking, or discussing which go beneath surface impressions, traditional myths, mere opinions, and routine clichés, understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text, technique, process, object, statements, image, or situation; applying the meaning to your own context. (p. 32)

For Lankshear (1994), critical literacy represents a vision of criticism. His vision does not only aim at the "text" but also focuses squarely to critique the traditions and discourses, and institutions that produce it.

Focusing on teachers as "transformative intellectuals" capable of producing, legitimating, and circulating knowledge, Giroux reveals an important dimension of this critical vision. Giroux's critical vision reflects the analysis of individuals' contexts in so far as such context is part of our everyday life. Combining Gramsci's (1971) notion of the engaged intellectual with Foucault's (1977) notion of the specific intellectual, Giroux advances the idea of teachers as "transformative intellectuals" to replace the dominate notion of teachers as educational "technicians," managers," or "professionals." Giroux sees teachers as individuals who connect their work to broader social concerns that deeply affect how people live, work, and survive (Giroux, 1991, p. 57). As "transformative intellectuals," Giroux (1988) believes that teachers can potentially play a significant role in creating schools as "democratic public spheres" which produce this vision of criticism, grounded in social transformation. He states:

> Teachers need to develop a discourse and set of assumptions that allow them to function more specifically as transformative intellectuals. As intellectuals, they will combine reflection and action in the interest of empowering students with the skills and knowledge needed to address injustice and to be critical actors committed to developing a world free of oppression and exploitation. Such intellectuals are not merely concerned with promoting individual achievement or advancing students along career ladders, they are concerned with empowering students so that the students can read the world critically and change it when necessary. (p. xxxiv)

Put in different terms, this vision of criticism attempts to merge theory and practice and seeks to identify inter-relationships and inter-connections between everyday life with knowledge learned in books. Through this vision, Giroux (1992) perceives a critical pedagogy of representation doing two things: first providing the basis for education to be "attentive to a politics of location, one which recognizes and interrogates the strengths and limitations of those places one inherits, engages, and occupies" and second to articulate a pedagogy which "frames the discourses through which we speak." Such vision of criticism is therefore analytic, evaluative, and goes beyond <u>form</u> and <u>content</u> to include <u>reflection</u> and <u>action</u>, contrary to what Considine and Haley have initially suggested.

Implementing a Vision of Criticism

In an attempt to design curricula which implements this vision of "criticism," described by Giroux and Lankshear, I established a media literacy course at the Pennsylvania State University for preservice teachers. Drawing on a range of concepts and techniques elaborated by theorists and teachers working in various critical language study, I have developed activities around a simple media text I believe has interesting possibilities for an interdisciplinary practice of critical literacy. I bring into the course the possibilities of working with media texts in conjunction with a set of rather different but relevant texts to address questions adapted from linguists and literacy educators like Allan Luke, Paulo Freire & Donaldo Macedo, and Castell, and Egan and others. Selected readings introduce the participants to curriculum inquiry methods, theories, critical media pedagogy, analytical schemes and techniques of building bridges between school and society and between students and teachers. These bridges are key components of the holistic, reflective teaching practice and learning, implicit in an integrated approach to education.

Offered every semester, this course calls for a context where preservice teachers across several subjects--English, Social studies, Early childhood education and science--work together in an integrated way to critically explore texts from their disciplines. The assumption is made that teachers will immerse themselves in a media text or topic, take the time to explore the text in order to find questions that are significant to the learner, and then, systematically investigate those questions. In this course, students examine more specially the role that beliefs and values play in our "knowing" and "doing" as teachers, particularly those beliefs, actions, and values shaped by our media culture and

that economic and other resources, advantages, and privileges are distributed inequitably in part because of power dynamics involving beliefs in racial, gender, and class divisions.

One competency that students acquire in this course is the ability to apply the narrative analytical framework to study visual and other media representations. Preservice teachers are encouraged to use this narrative method because it shifts attention from the content of stories to the structure and process of their telling; students learn to avoid rushing hastily to the judgement of moral tales without examining the evidence or analyzing the multiplicity of forms (fictional, non-fictional, print, oral, visual or pictorial, etc.,). Throughout this course students practice to question the text, the context, and the subtext. They learn how to analyze what is in the text as well as what is omitted from the text.

Preservice teachers learn that media literacy is a competency in critical literacy which focuses on reading, interpreting, and understanding how meaning is made and derived from print, photographs and other electronic visuals. Media literacy consists of understanding connotative messages embedded in the text of the visual messages, as well as interaction of pictures to words, the context of the viewer, and relayed messages obtained from the maker of the image. For example, in the analysis of visuals used for advertising in various print media or textbook illustrations, students strive to uncover some of the narrative meaning by questioning: (1) the order of events depicted, (2) the actual history of visual production, circulation, and consumption, and (3) who produced the visual, under what circumstances, and for what possible reasons. In this context, therefore, media literacy expands the notion of critical literacy to include taking a critical stance to all media texts. For teachers and students, the classroom becomes a media literacy learning environment, where the learning process is not disconnected from the

institutions which create knowledge and information, nor from the legal, cultural, political and economic contexts that surround the texts students read, whether from books, films or the Internet. As they read, view, and think about texts from a variety of media sources, they continually seek in the texts a media literacy "moment" which goes beneath the myths, clichés, bias, distortion, manipulation and stereotyping embedded in the media event, experience or emotion that drives the telling of the narrated text. When they read, view, and think about texts, they constantly remind themselves that no text is neutral and therefore immune to critique. In this sense, the critique or questioning does not seek answers but rather more questions which dig to deeper meanings.

My experience in working with preservice teachers has been insightful. It is particularly striking to observe them at the end of each semester and notice the extent to which their critical awareness has been raised. This awareness is especially visible in the rate of adoption of critical viewing, critical reading and critical thinking skills they tend to bring into their work; the broad definition of "literacy" these students eventually apply to a variety of projects they embark on long after completing the course. Some of their projects for graduation have also resulted in academic Honors Theses. For instance, in preparing a lesson plan in a High School English class one preservice teacher of media literacy wrote:

> Today's lesson addresses the fact that far too often oppressive events are packaged and phrased to take away any blame or remove any hint of ill-intent. Word choice and language are two techniques used by writers to shape readers' perception. [This lesson will] examine how writers present controversial

> issues and analyze what is and isn't included [in their narratives].

Another student, while evaluating a teaching unit which included literature circles and reading of the text, The Lakota Woman, remarked:

> It is just shocking to discover how much discrimination goes on in present day America towards native Americans! What is even more shocking is the fact that I had to come all the way to college to understand discrimination. I'm glad I found media literacy, the key to this understanding.

These two examples illustrate what critical pedagogy meant for these students. Their awareness was made particularly manifest when multimedia texts were introduced into the English curriculum. By applying media literacy skills to questioning how the novel, the film, and other media texts represented native Americans, students quickly realized the diverse layers of meanings, biases, distortion, manipulation, stereotyping and multiple perspectives present in texts. Alternative critical pedagogy meant for students to look outside of, as well as at the representation of Native Americans. They began to ask: "Who is the author/producer/artist?" "How was he/she placed in society?" "What are the cultural forces in the society in which the author/producer/artist was socially raised and/or is working?" "What is the message of the visual statement in terms of political and social import?" "How can this message be evaluated using the prevailing values of the culture of the artist rather than the viewer?" For these students, this course was a way to develop systematic educational inquiry approaches and models of critique, decoding, analyzing, and of reading biased visual images of women, minorities, people from other cultures, ethnic groups, and images of other social groups embedded in visual and media

messages, in order to recognize stereotypes, derogatory bias, and discrimination, and to understand how these images help to structure our experience.

At the core of the critical pedagogy movement is the need (1) to develop an awareness of the constructed nature of representation in both print and visual media; (2) to provide knowledge about the social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which media messages are produced by a variety of different institutions with specific objectives; and (3) to encourage renewed interest in learning about the ways in which individuals construct meaning from messages -- that is, about the processes of selecting, interpreting and acting upon messages in various contexts. Taken together, the process described here provides a critical stance, a method students and teachers can use to resist rampant consumption and consumerism, the overt race, class, and gender biases and manipulation in the media texts students read/view. Perhaps as teachers use this method of inquiry as a tool for their own learning and professional growth, they also become committed to a critical pedagogy which promotes social critique and a re-imagining of the common good in a diverse culture, and which creates classroom learning environments that support students in their inquiries. The ultimate goal is to create a more media-literate cadre of secondary school teachers who are reflective inquirers, decision-makers, and creators of knowledge; teachers who bring personal, social, and theoretical knowledge to bear to promote curriculum change and school improvement.

Explorations of Media Texts: Case Studies

My presentation of this paper at NRC was initially intended to respond and comment on implications of the case studies designed by Bekins, Pailliotet and others at this NRC session, case studies which serve to extend the kind of critical literacy and

vision of criticism I am talking about. As I examine these cases, I should emphasize issues of theory and practice which need to guide teachers' and students' reflection and action as suggested by Giroux, Kellner, and others. We ought to keep in mind also that practice and theory are complementary and interrelated. For instance, all classroom practice must be informed by specific theoretical concepts. Furthermore, theory can only be fully understood in relation to specific media practices and through practical application. But some questions persist: How can teachers' reflective and teaching practices develop a critical stance to generate a critical authoring, reading, and viewing of texts that enable students to navigate the seas of multiple texts, especially those represented in multimedia formats currently flooding students' learning environments through the Internet, video, CD-rom, etc., at a time when literacy education is no longer confined to paper-and-pencil technologies or "reading" and "writing"? How does the current climate of cultural conservatism present specific challenges to critical education? How can reader/viewer response analysis stimulate and help students develop critical reading, critical viewing, critical listening, and critical thinking for lifelong learning? How does critical viewing fit the lessons teachers will take up on Monday morning in their language arts or social studies classes? How do they fit with the requirements of academic standards and assessment prerogatives?

In this paper, I will comment on two cases. In the first case study, Lin Bekins explores Intermediality in undergraduate education by using the Internet in a university writing program. Through the dynamic interplay of socio-cultural situations and a variety of technology uses, Bekins studies how written meaning is constructed. In this project, Bekins enables students to critique technologies as having social cultural and political histories as well as everpresent implications. In using the Internet, Bekins invites

students to investigate how a discipline's use of technology might reflect its knowledge-making practices. In exploring this question, this project raises a critical and fundamental question about the construction of knowledge. It is through this questioning that students take up critical stances in their examination of technology and the array of texts that stem from it to form the meaning-making and written communication processes of particular disciplines.

Another important understanding that this project brings to bear on the language of criticism is that the Internet can function as a tool for literacy instruction, which enables students to enter a social, collaborative process by synthesizing and negotiating meaning. Negotiating meaning(s) is much ignored in the process of critical viewing, because it is taken for granted and perhaps denied when confronted.

Also illustrated in this instance, as well as in the other projects, is process-oriented exercises designed by Bekins to "provide students with the inner resources for making their own decisions about Internet resources they encounter" rather than imposing teacher's standards. But perhaps more importantly, we might ask: What will a critical discourse analysis (CDA) do for students in this situation? What can they learn from making their own decisions as they surf the Internet with regard to the vision of criticism described in this essay? We are told that they came to the realization that the production of meaning from media texts or those presentations found on the Internet depends upon knowledge which is shared by a community. Such community-based knowledge is shaped by its belief system, its worldview, its use of language, and by how one is positioned in her/his own culture in relation to other people.

One of the principles of teaching critical reading/viewing is to identify where knowledge comes from, and how meanings are constructed. In other words, how does

anyone come to know what they know about a certain event or group? How did the Internet authors come to know and enforce the rules of the discipline? Proponents of critical pedagogy would suggest that an individual's sense of self is organized according to various categories, such as gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation and so on, as well as those categories encompassing different "interest groups" like social groups, listserve user-groups or political affiliations. The characteristics and values associated with these categories include the way we look, how we behave, the lifestyle we adopt, and even the way we buy goods and services. As individuals or group, we come to recognize how certain characteristics are considered more or less socially appropriate or acceptable.

Ideas about what people are like and how they are meant to be understood already prevail in our culture. These ideas are embedded in mass media presentations and are part of the conventions or agenda of media executives who are in the business of reproducing a social hierarchy through the stories distributed through programs from news, sitcoms, MTV to rap music. These stories, including scientific findings or data-based information, allow a certain gender, race, or class to dominate or be dominated by another that claims superiority as scientists, experts, or technicists. These ideas give meaning to our sense of self and allow us to position ourselves in relation to others. Such context of meanings and attitudes can be recognized in all media, including the Internet. We need to acknowledge the fact that the way representations of race, gender, class or age are constructed will be as important as the ideas and meaning they project, since they offer positions for us, through which we recognize images as similar, or different from ourselves and those around us (Swanson, 1991, p. 128). As it was discovered by Bekins' students, even though images and meanings change over time, we

continually define ourselves in changing relations to these images and meanings, as defined by the community of the discipline.

It is also important to note that Bekins' approach departs from the dominant U.S. pragmatic, skills-based model whose objective is to train individuals for industry. Instead, Bekins takes on a constructivist perspective, that is, an approach in which the acquisition of knowledge is viewed as incremental, socially and culturally mediated, and individually situated. In addition, learning is understood as a self-regulated process of dealing with cognitive conflicts that become apparent through experience, interactive discourse, and reflection. Within the context of Intermediality, Bekins' project goes further to show that in the "Intermedial" class, groups of students may be empowered by the Internet to have a far wider range of cultural references at their disposal than any single teacher could have. She found that the expertise which once existed in the classroom was more widely dispersed. Furthermore, teachers no longer possessed an approved body of knowledge to which they alone held keys, and which they were expected to dispense or pass down to students. Students could now reflect critically upon information, side by side, in a way which had been difficult in the past before the Internet made its entry into the classroom.

This case study provides a "critical vision" in an English composition classroom. Although it still needs to be extended to other areas outside the English classroom, it is important to note that Bekins laid out a broad-based process through which students collaboratively and individually navigated the Internet to find meaning for themselves and discover identity within the community of the discipline they belong to.

In the second case study, Pailliotet introduces a process called Deep Viewing. This critical reader/active-viewer approach to media texts employs a three-level analysis to critically analyze, understand and interact with information. This approach's design

combines a heuristic framework and semiotic codes for understanding text. One outstanding feature which the Deep Viewing method brings into the language of criticism is the insistence of reflection and action in the classroom. Pailliotet underscores that in order for Deep Viewing to work, participants must pose questions and develop ways they might act in future, based on their own assessments, those of their code group, and those within the classroom. Participants are encouraged to relate text to their own experiences, expectations, feelings and knowledge. In essence, Deep Viewing makes explicit the language of criticism discussed in this essay. It provides a practical way of making critical inquiry, personal reflection, active learning, ethical decision-making, ongoing research, and analytical observation to become daily activity for teachers and students. Through constant questioning of texts and modelling to students, Pailliotet successfully pilots the vision of criticism in her classroom. The results confirm that students were able to analyze, respond, think complexly, critically evaluate, and teach with many texts.

Taking a Critical Stance

Taking a critical stance to critical viewing sounds like tautology. However, it is important to caution that not all instances or projects involving critical viewing are "critical." Put simply, critical viewing means different things to different people. Traditional educators have ignored the critique of schooling, social conditions, and ideological contexts for so long that it is not natural for teachers to take up a critical stance in readings or classroom discussions. The kinds of inquiry advocated and described in this paper stand apart from the positivistic, ahistorical, and depoliticized analysis employed by both liberal and conservative educators who have adopted the viewer-response and active-viewer approaches without taking a critical stance. As shown

in the case studies discussed here, the vision of criticism implied in discourse analysis, Deep Viewing, and reader/viewer response, attempts to merge theory and practice to coincide with Giroux's critical democratic vision of schools and society. It further seeks to identify inter-relationships and inter-connections between everyday life with knowledge learned in books. In practice, these analytical strategies provide teachers with concrete and viable forms of critical inquiry.

To take a critical stance one must ask: Do we want our schools to create a passive, risk-free citizenry, or a politicized citizenry, capable of fighting for various forms of public life and informed concern for equality and social justice? When Peter McLaren raises these kinds of questions in his writings, he intends to infuse a vision of criticism in classroom today (McLaren, 1988, p. 3). In this vision, he hopes to encourage teachers to take a critical stance in their teaching practice. In taking such a critical stance, teachers would no longer define curriculum in terms of the abstract categories of various isolated disciplines (such as history, English literature, social studies, etc.), but rather would incorporate themes and issues that address the concrete conditions and problems of adult life. In this new role, teachers are guides and facilitators rather than managers and dispensers of knowledge. As a method of curriculum and instruction, therefore, critical viewing challenges teachers and students to examine visual media as an object of study by exploring its languages, codes, and conceptual frameworks and further asks what sense students in classrooms today make of visual media as an object of study (Manzi & Rowe, p. 42).

Through the questioning of media texts, students will engage in a process of learning the "deeper" meaning, and thus become empowered to form identities and worldviews that are their own, resisting the media spectacles that persuade and

manipulate them to accept the interests of supposedly neutral formulations of science. Thus, we encourage students and teachers to view content as an ongoing developmental process on the part of the learner. We are suggesting that content must be relevant to the learners' experience and that larger process-related considerations should govern the selection of content. Applying this kind of critical mindedness in tackling texts and making this stance the object of media literacy alters the central tenets of the dichotomous arguments of content perspective on curriculum. That is what the practice of media literacy provides. The goal of the language of criticism is to generate among teachers and students the habits of questioning until they question all information every time they encounter it, regardless of its source or the institutions they belong to.

Conclusion

This essay proposed the language of criticism as a reflective teaching approach to theory and classroom practice. The language of critical pedagogy was used to situate critical viewing as an analytic method of media texts and to examine the ways in which the language of media is socially and historically produced. Throughout this paper, critical viewing was described as a process rather than an analytical tool with which to engage students to question the clarity and strength for reasoning, identify assumptions and values, recognize points of view and attitudes, and evaluate conclusions and actions provided by all narratives across the curriculum--whether they be short stories, poems, plays, picture books, films or pieces of nonfiction. The analytical method described here moves away from the limited approach of presenting course materials in the flat monotone of objectivity, or conveying the false impression that knowledge is static, monolithic and universal. Instead, the guiding assumptions are that when students are

introduced to critical viewing, they will implement a critical vision grounded in multiple ways of knowing and that their experiences will become part of the multiple texts they encounter everyday, and that these texts will become integral parts of instruction. Such an approach provides a solid foundation for students' sense of Intermediality in the construction of knowledge and eventually reinforces their multiple ways of knowing.

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